

# Research on the Integration of International Understanding Education into Junior High School English Reading: A Cultural and Pedagogical Exploration of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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**Abstract:** In the context of global education reform, cultivating intercultural competence and international understanding is becoming a key aim of English language education. This study explores how *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a classic British literary work, can be integrated into junior high school English reading instruction to support the development of students' global awareness and cross-cultural communication competence. Drawing on UNESCO's framework for Global Citizenship Education and Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, the study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework including cultural element identification, cross-cultural comparison, and instructional design. Through close reading and cultural interpretation of selected scenes, the study proposes task-based learning strategies that embed language acquisition within meaningful intercultural experiences. The findings suggest that literature-based reading instruction not only enhances students' language proficiency but also serves as a powerful platform for developing critical thinking, empathy, and international understanding. While the study is limited to one literary text and conceptual design, it offers practical insights and a foundation for further empirical research on the integration of classic literature and global education in English language classrooms.

**Keywords:** Education for International Understanding; English Reading Instruction; Intercultural Communicative Competence; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; Literary Pedagogy; Junior High School Education

## 1. Introduction

In an era of accelerating globalization and technological advancement, developing students' international perspectives and intercultural communication competence has become a central aim of basic education in China. Language, as a carrier of culture, functions not only as a means of communication but also as a bridge to understanding diverse worldviews and fostering global awareness. The *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* emphasize that English education should help students "respect cultural diversity, understand different lifestyles and ways of thinking across cultures, and cultivate both international understanding and intercultural communication competence"[7]. Accordingly, junior high school English instruction should go beyond linguistic proficiency to include opportunities for cultural exploration through reading and communicative activities.

Among various pedagogical tools, extracurricular reading plays a unique and irreplaceable role in developing students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Classic English literature, in particular, provides rich language input and meaningful exposure to diverse cultural contexts. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, one of the most enduring works of British children's literature, is distinguished by its imaginative narrative, symbolic characters, and layered social and cultural references. Its inclusion in junior high reading curricula offers students not only literary enrichment but also a platform for exploring differences between Chinese and Western cultures, thereby encouraging open-minded, inclusive, and reflective cultural attitudes.

While cultural awareness has been acknowledged as an important goal in English education, relatively few studies have examined how classic English literature can be systematically integrated

into junior high school teaching from the perspective of international understanding education. Against this backdrop, this study takes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a focal text and explores its instructional value through the lens of international understanding. Specifically, it addresses three research questions:

- (1) What representative cultural elements are embedded in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*?
- (2) How can reading activities be designed based on these elements to align with the cognitive characteristics of junior high school students?
- (3) In what ways can English reading instruction support the development of students' international understanding competence?

This study aims to contribute new insights into the integration of English language and international understanding education and to provide practical strategies for using literature to promote global competence in junior high school classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations of International Understanding Education

Education for International Understanding (EIU), initially proposed by UNESCO in 1946, aims to promote peace and global cooperation by fostering mutual understanding, respect for diversity, and intercultural dialogue among nations. It encourages learners to explore different cultural frameworks and develop the ability to engage constructively across cultural boundaries. As globalization intensifies, EIU has evolved to encompass not only knowledge of other cultures but also the development of intercultural communicative competence, empathy, and global citizenship[8].

Banks outlines three foundational pillars of international understanding: (1) recognition and respect for cultural diversity, (2) development of intercultural communication skills, and (3) cultivation of global civic consciousness[1]. These dimensions closely align with the *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* in China, which emphasize the importance of preparing students to “understand diverse cultural backgrounds, respect differences, and develop international perspectives and communication skills”[7].

Byram further conceptualizes intercultural communicative competence as comprising attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of social groups and their practices, skills of interpreting and relating, and the capacity for critical cultural awareness[2]. This model highlights the need for learners not only to understand other cultures but also to critically reflect on their own assumptions and values.

Maxwell et al. argue that international education must bridge the gap between global ideals and local realities[5]. They caution against superficial multiculturalism and advocate for embodied and transformative forms of intercultural learning that engage learners affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally. These frameworks position English language education, particularly reading instruction, as a powerful medium for advancing international understanding. Literature serves not only as a source of linguistic input but also as a portal to cultural complexity and ethical reflection, enabling students to become informed, empathetic, and globally competent individuals.

### 2.2 Extracurricular English Reading and the Development of Cultural Awareness

Extracurricular reading serves as an essential complement to classroom instruction, providing a valuable avenue for developing students' linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, extensive exposure to comprehensible and meaningful texts plays a key role in language acquisition, particularly when it involves authentic materials[4].

At the junior high school level, students benefit significantly from reading original English literary works, which expose them to diverse cultural values, norms, and worldviews. Such texts offer students the opportunity to engage with real-life social and cultural contexts, thereby fostering intercultural sensitivity and global perspectives.

The *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* explicitly advocate for cultivating “correct worldviews, values, and attitudes” through language learning[7]. In this context, classic English literature provides more than linguistic enrichment—it offers complex sociocultural

input that helps students develop the ability to interpret and reflect on cultural differences.

For example, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* introduces students to aspects of Victorian British society, such as etiquette, logic, and symbolic representations of childhood. These narratives allow learners to explore not only the target language but also the deeper cultural constructs behind it. This aligns with Byram's model of intercultural competence, which emphasizes the importance of critical cultural awareness in language education.

Furthermore, Merryfield asserts that meaningful global education must be grounded in lived experience and active engagement[6]. She emphasizes that cultural understanding emerges through dialogue, storytelling, and personal reflection rather than the passive transmission of facts. Supporting this view, Dvalidze highlights that storytelling promotes both emotional resonance and intercultural empathy, making literature an effective vehicle for fostering international understanding[3].

Extracurricular English reading—particularly when centered on culturally rich narratives—provides an indispensable platform for developing students' language skills alongside their intercultural communication competence. It supports a “language plus culture” approach that aligns with modern educational priorities and the holistic goals of English curriculum reform.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Research Object

This study adopts Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) as the primary text for analysis. The novel is renowned for its vivid language, imaginative narrative structure, linguistic playfulness, and embedded cultural symbolism. These features not only endow the work with significant literary value but also offer considerable pedagogical potential for language acquisition and cross-cultural education.

Given the linguistic and cognitive characteristics of junior high school learners, this study utilizes the Puffin Classics edition of the novel. This edition retains the stylistic richness of the original while making moderate adaptations to vocabulary and sentence complexity, thereby improving accessibility for young English learners.

The analysis focuses on three core chapters “Down the Rabbit-Hole,” “The Mad Tea Party,” and “Who Stole the Tarts?”, which offer dense cultural content and vivid narrative appeal. These sections provide a practical foundation for identifying representative cross-cultural themes and designing relevant teaching activities.

The selection of this text aims to facilitate the systematic identification of cultural elements and to explore how these can be pedagogically applied within junior high school English reading instruction. Ultimately, the study seeks to enhance students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and international understanding in line with the goals of International Understanding Education[8].

#### 3.2 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology that integrates textual analysis with instructional design.

The first stage involves close reading and textual analysis of the novel to identify culturally embedded elements, including social norms, value systems, and cognitive frameworks. Drawing on Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, the analysis pays particular attention to learners' attitudes toward cultural difference, their interpretive skills, and their capacity for critical cultural reflection[2].

In the second stage, the identified cultural content is used to inform instructional design, guided by the framework of International Understanding Education. Drawing also on Maxwell et al., the instructional strategies proposed aim to balance global values with students' local educational contexts[5]. Activities are designed to promote intercultural sensitivity and literacy while remaining age-appropriate and pedagogically practical.

This dual approach, combining theory-driven analysis with application-oriented design, provides both conceptual grounding and actionable guidance for incorporating classic English literature into culturally responsive English instruction at the junior high school level.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

To systematically examine the cultural dimensions embedded in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and assess their pedagogical value within the framework of International Understanding Education, this study adopts a three-dimensional analytical model. The framework integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains in alignment with UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education approach and is designed to foster comprehensive intercultural competence through literature-based English instruction[8].

The first dimension is Cultural Elements Identification. This involves recognizing and categorizing key socio-cultural features of 19th-century British society reflected in the text. Examples include norms of social etiquette, concepts of law and authority, perceptions of time, and views on childhood and education. These elements are illustrated through specific scenes and dialogues across selected chapters, providing tangible entry points for cultural interpretation.

The second dimension is Cultural Comparison and Critical Thinking. Drawing from Byram's and Merryfield's frameworks, this component emphasizes engaging students in comparative analysis between British and Chinese cultural values—for instance, in areas such as hospitality practices, notions of authority, and societal expectations of childhood[2][6]. Critical questioning techniques are used to help students reflect not only on the foreign culture but also on their own, thereby promoting intercultural awareness and empathy.

The third dimension is Orientation toward International Understanding Education. This ensures that both textual analysis and instructional design are aligned with the broader goals of fostering respect for cultural diversity, appreciation of difference, and development of global responsibility [8]. To this end, specific classroom activities, such as background cultural briefings, small-group discussions, and cross-cultural role-plays, are proposed to help students connect linguistic learning with meaningful cultural exploration.

By structuring the analysis around these three interrelated dimensions, the study aims to provide a coherent pedagogical pathway through which students can enhance both their English proficiency and their global competence.

## **4. Textual Analysis and Instructional Application**

### **4.1 Analysis of Cultural Elements in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland***

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is deeply rooted in Victorian British culture and reflects the social norms, values, and reasoning traditions of its time. Analyzing key scenes from the text enables students to explore embedded cultural messages and compare them with their own societal experiences, thereby cultivating intercultural awareness.

#### **4.1.1 The Mad Tea Party: British Afternoon Tea Culture and Social Rituals**

In Chapter Seven, "A Mad Tea Party" Alice encounters the Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse in an absurd, never-ending tea gathering. This scene parodies the conventions of British afternoon tea culture, marked by ritualized etiquette, polite conversation, and fixed procedures. Carroll uses humor and exaggeration to critique the rigidity and formality of Victorian social customs.

Students analyzing this scene can examine the cultural significance of tea as both a daily habit and a symbolic social event. When compared with Chinese tea culture—which emphasizes emotional connection and hospitality over timing and formality—students begin to see tea as a reflection of broader cultural values. This provides a foundation for intercultural comparison and reflection.

Instructionally, teachers can introduce British afternoon tea through multimedia resources, facilitate discussions on cross-cultural hospitality customs, and organize role-playing activities in which students adapt the tea party scene using contemporary or Chinese cultural elements.

#### **4.1.2 The Queen of Hearts's Trial: Authority and Justice in Cultural Context**

In Chapter Eleven, "Who Stole the Tarts?", the Queen of Hearts presides over a chaotic, authoritarian trial. Her repeated exclamations "Off with their heads!" and the lack of due process in the proceedings serve as a satirical critique of arbitrary power and the failings of justice.

This scene invites students to reflect on how authority, law, and justice are represented in literature

and society. While Victorian Britain retained monarchic symbolism, the rise of constitutionalism and legal reform increasingly questioned blind obedience to authority. Students can compare this depiction with traditional Chinese understandings of hierarchy and governance, opening discussions on cultural conceptions of fairness and power.

Teachers may encourage reenactments of the trial, followed by debates on themes such as “Does authority guarantee justice?” or “How is power legitimized across cultures?”, thereby promoting critical engagement with the text and the underlying cultural constructs.

#### **4.2 Cross-Cultural Comparison and Critical Thinking Guidance**

Identifying cultural references is only a starting point, deeper learning occurs when students compare, interpret, and critically reflect upon these differences. As Byram argues, intercultural competence involves not only awareness of other cultures but also the ability to examine one’s own assumptions and engage in critical cultural analysis[2].

Using the Mad Tea Party and traditional Chinese tea culture, students can construct comparative charts (e.g., Venn diagrams) to examine differences in values, such as punctuality versus relational harmony. Guiding questions like “What does etiquette reveal about societal expectations?” help students develop metacognitive insight into how culture shapes behavior.

Similarly, the Queen of Hearts’s trial provides a platform for critical writing, such as “Is power always just?” or “How is justice defined in your own society?”. These tasks require students to connect textual analysis with personal and cultural experiences, reinforcing critical awareness and empathy.

Merryfield emphasizes that global understanding emerges not from surface-level facts but through experiences that challenge and expand learners’ worldviews. Literature—particularly when paired with reflective tasks—provides such experiences, helping students move toward nuanced, ethical, and globally conscious perspectives [6].

#### **4.3 Instructional Design Based on International Understanding Education**

Integrating *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* into English instruction provides rich opportunities for aligning language learning with the goals of International Understanding Education. Based on the UNESCO Global Citizenship Education framework, instruction should engage students cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally[8].

This study proposes a “Pre-Reading – While-Reading – Post-Reading” structure:

Pre-Reading:

Introduce students to Victorian British culture through short videos, visuals, or structured prompts. Activate prior knowledge and prepare learners for key cultural themes.

While-Reading:

Facilitate collaborative analysis of selected scenes. Encourage students to discuss cultural values embedded in the narrative and create comparative visual aids (e.g., charts, maps).

Post-Reading:

Assign creative cross-cultural projects, such as adapting the Mad Tea Party to a modern Chinese context. These allow students to apply language skills while engaging in cultural reinterpretation and expression.

Through such integrated activities, students enhance their reading comprehension, deepen intercultural insight, and build transferable global competencies. This approach echoes the aims of China’s *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)*, which emphasize understanding cultural diversity, developing critical thinking, and cultivating global vision [7].

Ultimately, literature-based instruction grounded in international understanding prepares students not only as proficient language users but also as empathetic global citizens capable of navigating an increasingly complex and multicultural world.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the integration of Education for International Understanding (EIU) into junior high school English reading instruction through the lens of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Grounded in a three-part framework—textual analysis of cultural elements, cross-cultural comparison with critical thinking, and instructional design aligned with international understanding principles—the research demonstrates that classic English literature can serve as an effective vehicle for advancing global competence in language classrooms.

The findings suggest that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* offers not only rich linguistic input but also multilayered cultural representations that enable students to engage with diverse values, norms, and social perspectives. When supported by purposeful instructional design, such texts can help students deepen cultural awareness, develop intercultural communicative competence, and cultivate critical thinking skills. These outcomes align with the holistic objectives emphasized in China's *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)*, particularly the aim to foster globally aware, culturally sensitive learners through diversified English learning tasks.

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